

RECEIVED
PERIODICALS

27 1996
DREW UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

RECEIVED
FEB 26 2024

BY:

Affirmation

United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Concerns

Fall 1996

Volume 21

Number 3

**Affirmation at the Names
Project Quilt Weekend**
Washington, DC, Oct. 11-13
Memorial Service
Set for Saturday
October 12, 1996

Come to remember and hope! During Quilt Weekend, October 11-13, 1996, National Affirmation will organize a memorial service for all those who have died of AIDS. Our worship service will be on Saturday, October 12, at 1 pm at Foundry United Methodist Church, which is located at 16th and P Streets, Northwest, just several blocks east of the DuPont Circle metro station. Following the memorial service there will be a social time in the fellowship hall. As of August, invited speakers are UM Bishop Susan Morrison, Dr. Peter Hawley of the Whitman-Walker Clinic and Mark Bowman of the Reconciling Congregation Program. ▽

Fall Meeting in New York City
October 18-20, 1996

Affirmation members do theology! Affirmation members do New York!

That will be the headline in the New York Times when we get done! Don't miss out in being able to say: "Been there! Done that!" with pride!

The Fall Gathering will be held at St. Paul and St. Andrews United Methodist Church, a Reconciling Congregation at 86th and Broadway, starting at 7 p.m. on Friday, October 18 and ending after lunch on Sunday, October 20.

You will find the registration form on Page Eleven of this Newsletter and information about housing on Page Twelve.

Building/Developing a Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Theology of Liberation will be the theme for the Gathering, and this theme has been developed by Affirmation members from the San Francisco area. This Program Design Team is led by Randy Miller and includes Gloria Soliz, Fritz Schultz, Kelly Love, Beulah Soliz and Karen Olivedo. ▽

Among the Items in This Issue

Book Review.....	2.
<i>Unrepentant, Self-Affirming, Practicing</i>	
<i>Is the Church Finally "Coming Out?"</i>	5.
Local News.....	6. & 7.
Fall Meeting Registration Form.....	11.

NOW IS THE TIME TO REGISTER!

FALL NATIONAL AFFIRMATION GATHERING

New York City, October 18-20, 1996

RECEIVED
FEB 26 2024

BY:

Unrepentant, Self-Affirming, Practicing
Lesbian/Bisexual/Gay People
within Organized Religion

By Gary David Comstock
The Continuum Publishing Group
New York, NY
352 pp \$29.95 hbd

This newest book by Mr. Comstock is of particular interest to members of Affirmation because some of his findings and statistics are based on a questionnaire sent to our members back in the early '90s.

However, the book is much more than a report on Affirmation members. It covers the response of religious organizations to the issues of homosexuality from colonial times to the present; mostly in the United States, but also touching on Canada and, to a lesser extent, other countries.

The book is a wonderful source of statistics with many tables and extensive notes, but there is more than enough narrative to make it very interesting reading.

In the preface, Mr. Comstock states "To be accepted [by some religious bodies] one must be self-reproaching, self-denying, and celibate" as opposed to being unrepentant, self-affirming, practicing homosexuals, which certainly is our God-given right.

Mr. Comstock includes touches of many personal stories of gays within many different denominations and traditions, both lay people and clergy, about their experiences in dealing with both church hierarchy and church members. Most of these stories are of negative responses; a few are of positive and welcoming acceptances.

The author obviously has done a great deal of his own research, but he also gives us overviews of the work of other researchers in the field of religion and homosexuality.

The material is well organized with extensive notations of sources and a very useful index. Anyone interested in the relationship of homosexuality and organized religion should include this book in their library.

Mr. Comstock concludes the book with a poem about the suicide of a UM lesbian who had her heart and mind set on becoming a UM minister.

His final paragraph: "As gay people contemplate the future, we should know that if

mainstream religion becomes more humane, charitable, and welcoming of all people, such changes will depend significantly on us. If we choose to take responsibility to advocate for and participate in those changes, we should also know that our lives will be marked with some moments of exhilarating freedom and hope as well as unrelenting if not crushing defeats and humiliation."

g. f. h. ▽

For A Friend, Gone Too Soon

Dear Father,

Someone is knocking at your door. Please let him in. His name is John and he is bringing to You some of our tears and pains.

Listen to him.

Dear Lord,
Help us cope with this loss, and help us keep that faith which gives us the strength to go on, each day, in your path.

We lost his body, You gained his soul.
With his soul your army of love and compassion has found new strength.

Through him, wipe some of our tears and relieve some of our pains.

Please God, keep him in your heart as he is in ours.

Sal Di Florio, a volunteer with the Cape Cod AIDS Council, upon the death of his buddy, John.

Don't Forget!

FALL NATIONAL GATHERING

DEADLINE FOR REGISTRATION IS
SEPTEMBER 20
for free housing
or
OCTOBER 1
otherwise!

Witness of Randy Miller at the 1996 General Conference

Out of the wilderness we cry, O Lord. God hear our prayer. And how, how shall I sing, sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?

My dear brothers and sisters, I rise before you this morning to witness to the redeeming power of Jesus Christ, and to tell the good news that God's spirit is even now at work, reconciling and healing all those whom the Spirit touches. I know that the God who has brought us thus far on our journey will not forsake us until we are perfected in grace.

My sisters and brothers, I rise before you this morning as a proud African-American, as a gay man, as a Christian, a United Methodist and a child of God, seeking God's will for my life, the life of the church and the life of the world. I have been asked to provide a witness this morning to the terrible scourge of discrimination faced by gays and lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered persons all over the world.

Although I am not yet 40 years old, I have enough discrimination and hatred as an African-American man and as an openly gay man, to turn the heart to stone.

I waited for the outcry from the religious community. . .

While attending seminary in Atlanta in the 1980s, I witnessed the torching of a newly-built Metropolitan Community Church simply because it was a place that welcomed gay and lesbian

Christians. I waited for the outcry from the religious community that I naively thought must inevitably come when a house of God is desecrated. The silence was deafening. Lord, have mercy on us!

While working at the General Board of Discipleship in Nashville, Tennessee, I met a gay man in church who had suffered irreparable brain damage after having been savagely beaten by a group of angry young teenagers who came upon him and his lover sitting in their car together. His lover was beaten to death. Lord, have mercy upon us!

I have felt the alienation that must always go hand in hand with discrimination.

And in my own life, I have known the fear of losing my job and livelihood. I have felt the discrimination that comes from being born both African-American and gay. I have started over far too many times and searched far too often in vain for job openings where living proudly and openly, as God created all of us to be, was not a liability, but an asset. I have felt the alienation that must always go hand in hand with discrimination. I know the rejection of being the unwelcome guest, even in God's house, even in this church.

In this very state in which we hold this great conference, a law has been passed which would deny me my civil rights, and not allow me to seek the legal remedies should I lose my job or home simply because I am a gay man. Now those who support this measure argue that they are only protecting all of us against the special rights of a small minority. In response to

that, I hear the melodic voice of Coretta Scott King at a recent conference in Atlanta that I attended. Quoting her husband Martin, "We must come to see," she said, "that we are bound in an inescapable web of mutuality, and an injustice anywhere is an injustice everywhere."

. . . we come from a long tradition that has proudly stood and defended the human and civil rights of all people.

As United Methodists and the spiritual children of John Wesley, we come from a long tradition that has proudly stood and defended the human and civil rights of all people.

Discrimination and intolerance, no matter how they clothe themselves, and no matter where they occur, are great evils; no matter where they occur all around the world, [they] are great evils. They are not made more holy because some of those who support the repeal of the rights of lesbians and gays have communion with us in God's Church. They are not made more holy. As Christians, we dare not rest with simply supporting the civil rights of gay and lesbian people and all people. To paraphrase Jesus, "Even those who are without the fellowship of God, do this."

Jesus calls us to do more. Jesus calls us to embrace the exile and lift up the downtrodden, and surely, surely, that must include gay and lesbian people.

Let us pray today, my brothers and sisters, for a new understanding of the heart, that will, in the twinkling of an . . . Please turn to Page Four

Witness of Randy Miller.
. From Page Three
eye, give us an understanding of the sanctity of the human and civil rights of all God's children.

Let us pray that God's reconciling love will fall on us even now, even here, in this General Conference. . .

Let us pray that the time will come now, and come quickly, when we will no longer need civil rights laws to protect the least of these, because God's law will be written in every human heart.

Let us pray that God's reconciling love will fall on us even now, even here, in this General Conference, and that we will in tearful forgiveness embrace and comfort each other for past wrongs and as God's free children, reconcile.

Now, now is the moment to heal our Church.

And finally, [to] my gay and lesbian brothers and sisters I say, lift up your hearts, for God has not forsaken us, and our liberation must come as surely as morning follows the long night and as spring follows the bitter winter. I say, lift up your hearts, for our salvation is at hand. Now, now is the moment to heal our Church. Now is the moment to cast down the walls that divide us and be made one. Now is God's moment. Now. Now. Amen.

I pray that this is a faithful witness. ▽



Affirmation: Mississippi Files Articles of Incorporation

Jackson, MS—Mississippi's Affirmation filed for standing as a non-profit corporation with the Mississippi Secretary of State's office on January 26, 1996. The legal name for this newly formed organization is *Mississippi Affirmation - United Methodists for Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Concerns, Inc.* Dr. William A. Flint, M.Div., Ph.D., will serve as the contact person and coordinator for **Affirmation: Mississippi (UM)**. Dr. Flint has served in the Memphis Conference, Mississippi Conference and the North Texas Conference of The United Methodist Church before requesting termination of conference membership in May of 1986. He has been instrumental in assisting in the formation of several community organizations in Mississippi since returning to the state in 1986. Among the organizations are the Mississippi Phoenix Coalition [a 501(c)3 educational and service organization], MS Gay & Lesbian Task Force, and the MS Voice [gay press of Mississippi]. Dr. Flint is a member of Jackson's Galloway Memorial UMC.

Affirmation: Mississippi (UM) began in July 1993 on the long road to formation and now has finally made it to the first major step in its history. The organization operates the Community Switchboard, a computerized 24 hour switchboard system, serving the gay/lesbian/bisexual community in Jackson. Communications has been the major emphasis of this group. For additional information contact **Affirmation: Mississippi (UM)**, [redacted] Jackson, MS

[redacted] or e-mail
AFFIRMMS@AOL.COM. or
phone [redacted]
or fax us at [redacted] ▽

✱ ✱

RCP Press Release at GC:

Call to "Open the Doors" to Gays

**Resounds at GC--But
Church Doors Remain Closed**

The United Methodist General Conference, which met in Denver from April 16-26, was the scene of an unprecedented grass roots witness calling on the church to "open its doors" to lesbian, gay and bisexual persons and their families.

The 1,000 delegates to this quadrennial policy-making assembly of The United Methodist Church arrived in Denver from around the world to find signs in the windows of businesses near the conference site stating "Welcome United Methodists--Open the Doors to All Persons Regardless of Sexual Orientation!" Volunteers wearing *Open the Doors* buttons literally opened the doors to the convention center as delegates and visitors entered the building. Delegates received cards with jokes such as "Knock, knock. Who's there? *Darren*. Darren who? *Darin' you to open the doors!*" Delegates returned to their hotel rooms in the evening to find welcome mats outside their door which read "Jesus opened doors, won't you?"

The *Open the Doors* campaign was sponsored by the Reconciling Congregation Program, a national network of 130 United Methodist con-
Please turn to Page Ten

Is the Church Finally Coming Out?

The possibility discussed by
Dick Burdon at General Conference

Our beloved Methodist Church has been in the process of coming out for more than twenty years. The Stonewall riots of 1969 and the establishment of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches by Troy Perry empowered the Gay community to make bold strides towards acceptance. Intolerance manifested itself in countless ways. MCC members and pastors were harassed and murdered—churches were defaced and burned. These events and this new boldness frightened and angered established religious bodies. The reaction was violence and denunciation. Barriers were erected to keep out the unwanted and “undesirables” that God was sending to minister to the church.

I suggest that there is a parallel between an individual and a family struggling to accept homosexuality and the ramifications that implies and our church as a family. Our church is composed of a diversity of people which includes gay and lesbian members and closeted clergy whom we need to learn to accept and love. We need the precious spiritual gifts they offer to God and can share with us if we will allow it to happen.

The writer of The Revelation of John envisioned “a new heaven and a new earth.” Can we interpret that to mean a transformed church accepting its gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered members, and supporting a new vision of social justice that our world is “waiting in travail” to have offered it? What will the new church be like? I suggest it is a church that will need to open itself to study and discussion of a “love that has dared not call its name.” It is a church that will acknowledge that homosexuality touches the lives of twenty percent of its members. One in five families has some relative who is gay. Many live in isolation, others are too ashamed or frightened to discuss the matter in church. Still others are “tired” of hearing about the subject.

We as a church have imposed an inquisi-

tion upon ourselves by erecting embargoes to learning. We do not publish or fund books that would “promote an understanding of homosexuality.” The selection of study materials available though our publishing house is meager. John Boswell’s acclaimed book *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* is a valuable resource and available on request. This book points out that gay people were considered an essential part of the life and ministry of the church from its beginning. It was after 1200 CE that prejudices developed and were codified to establish harsh curbs to acceptance in the church and society. It is unclear what influenced the church to submit to and enforce social intolerance. In Boswell’s last book *Same Sex Unions in Pre-modern Europe* we discover that gay marriage preceded the practice of opposite sex marriage in the church. Same-sex unions were based on loving covenants, always sacramental and practiced in the church. In contrast heterosexual marriage was often political, arranged by families, and followed Roman law in order to pass on inheritance. The church declared marriage a sacrament in 1215 AD and began to conduct the services in

Even if one barrier in our church law were not changed our Church has had a great “Coming Out Party” here in Denver!

the church from that time on. Probably most in our church today are ignorant of this rich tradition of gay acceptance and activity in the church.

The study of the history of the relationship of gay people to the church is valuable and enlightening, however, it is also essential to have tools available for parents, friends and church members to study and understand, and support non-gay people struggling to comprehend this new relationship to gay brothers and lesbian sisters.

Even if one barrier in our church law were not changed our Church has had a great “Coming Out Party” here in Denver! The voices of 15 Bishops was like a major tremor which makes a statement that “we do not agree with public opinion” that is unfair in its treatment of gay people. The Holy Spirit sent a mighty wind that ripped the door off St. Paul’s UMC transforming it into a communion table.

Please turn to Page Eight. . . .

Affirmation National Council

Richard Bates
Austin, TX

Jeanne Barnett
Folsom, CA

John R. Calhoun
Oklahoma City, OK

Morris Floyd
Minneapolis, MN

David L. Gunnell
Evanston, IL

Judy Cara Hicks
Evanston, IL

Rick Huskey
Washington, DC

David W. Meredith
Cincinnati, OH

Ann Freeman Price
Nyack, NY

Rebecca Richards
Baltimore, MD

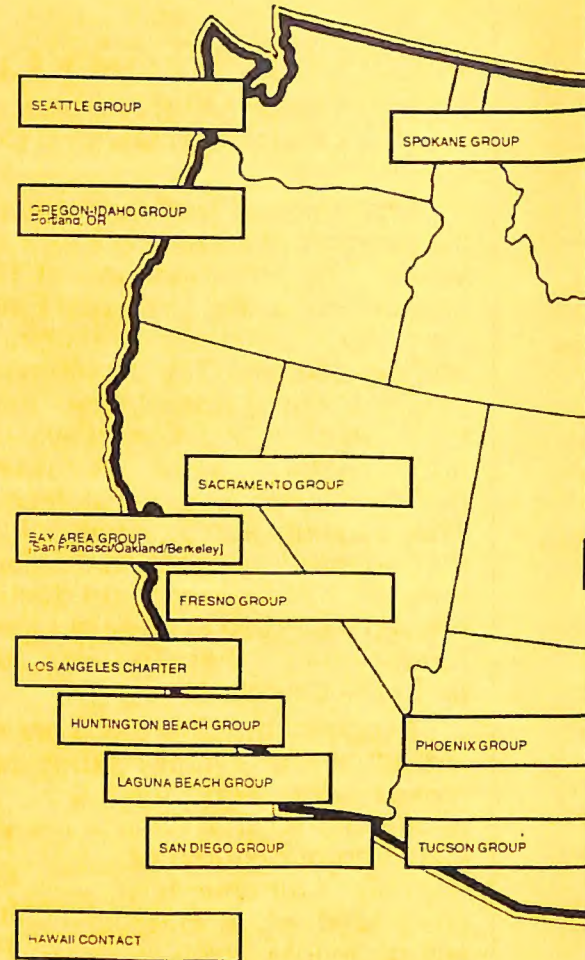
Paul Thompson
Studio City, CA

Judith WestLee
Minneapolis, MN

Mark Wilson
Tuscaloosa, AL

Sam Wilson
Dallas TX

One woman in New York



Dallas Affirmation In May the group held their General Meeting during their Annual Memorial Day Picnic. At the June Meeting Mac McPherson spoke about "Sex Education in the Local Church." In July, two videos were presented, Looking For Langston. Langston Hughes was an important black gay voice in the 1920's. Also featured was Homosexuality and the Bible: Pro and Con. The video features two Episcopal priests, Rev. John Spong and Rev. William Wantland expressing opposing viewpoints on the biblical passages concerning Homosexuality. In August the group will celebrate in song during their Songfest! Dallas Affirmation meets for a monthly pot luck dinner with fellowship and program every fourth

Monday at 7:00 pm

For additional info
Dallas,
call

Affirmation

Affirmation Los second Sunday of programs, worship fellowship at Holm. For more informat
West Hollyv

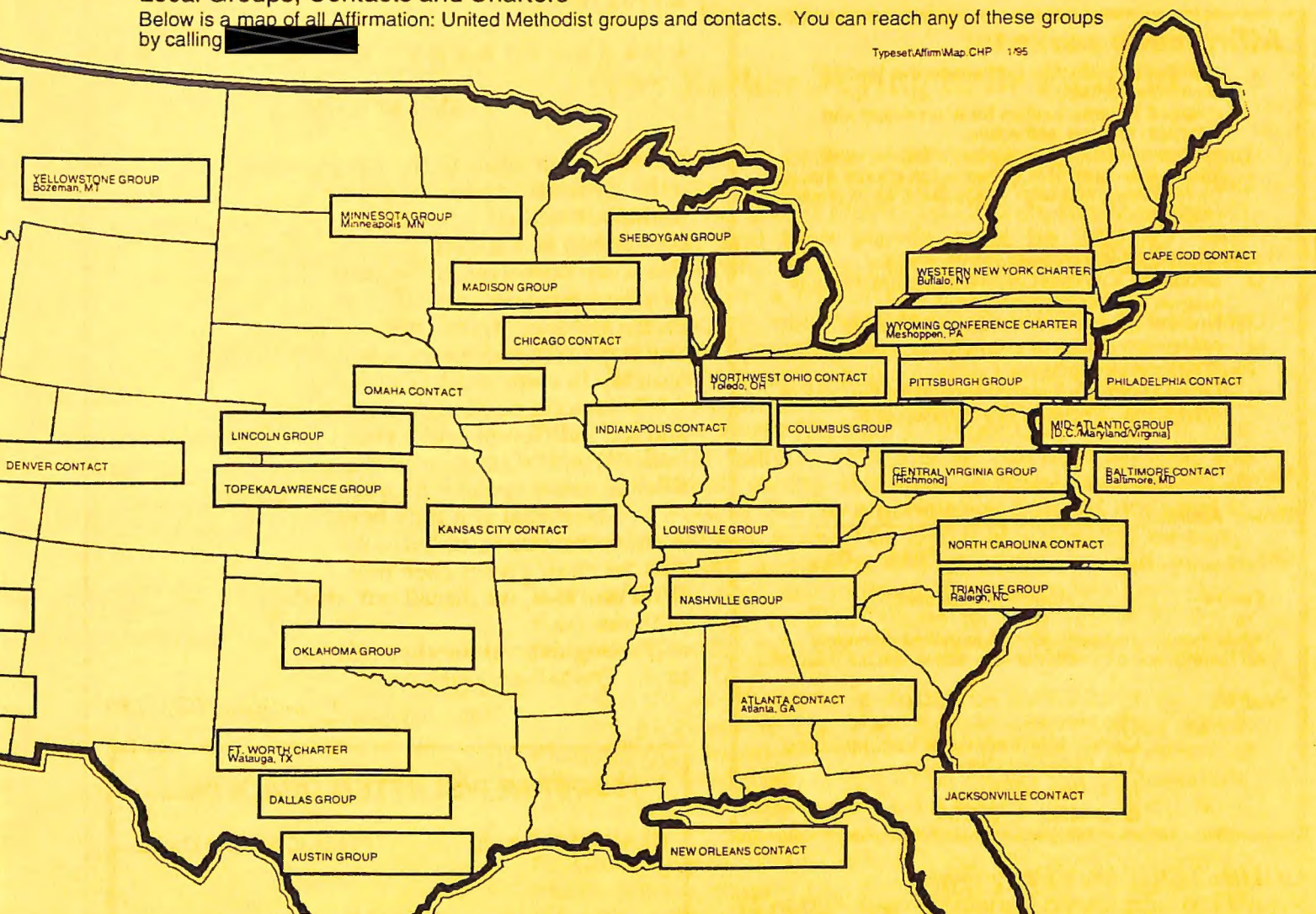
Cape Cod Aff

the first Sunday of p.m. at the Osterv the meeting the gr restaurant for a li

Local Groups, Contacts and Charters

Below is a map of all Affirmation groups and contacts. You can reach any of these groups by calling [REDACTED]

Typeset/Affirm/Map.CHP 1/95



LOCAL NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

[REDACTED], at Northaven UMC, [REDACTED] at Northaven Road. For more information write to [REDACTED] Texas [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Los Angeles

Los Angeles meets the [REDACTED] of each month for [REDACTED], refreshments and [REDACTED] at a UMC at 7:00 p.m. For more information write to [REDACTED] Wood, CA [REDACTED] or call [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] meets on [REDACTED] each month at 3:00 [REDACTED] UMC. Following [REDACTED] group goes to a local [REDACTED] Sunday supper.

For more information write Barry Jones-Henry, [REDACTED] Hyannis, MA [REDACTED] or call him at [REDACTED]

Nashville Affirmation In May the group met to hear a evening of report and dialogue about the actions of the General Conference. In June the group gathered for an evening of fellowship over dinner at the Calypso Cafe. In July plans for a program with staff or officers of the Lesbian/Gay Coalition for Justice. For information about monthly meetings and other activities write to Affirmation, P.O. Box 24213, Nashville, TN 37202 or call [REDACTED]

Shalom Ministries celebrates its third birthday with a dinner and program in June. Also in June, Shalom Ministries carried a banner in the Portland lesbian and gay pride parade. There are a variety of support groups are held throughout the week by Shalom Ministries.

For more information about Shalom Ministries write to [REDACTED] Portland, OR [REDACTED] or call [REDACTED]

Please send a copy of your Newsletter or information about how, when, and where your group meets. Be sure to include a contact person, address or phone number. You can send all information to Fritz Schultz, [REDACTED] San Francisco, CA [REDACTED]

- coordinate advocacy with supportive United Methodist groups;
- respond to opportunities for ecumenical and interfaith witness and action;
- sponsor education and information services;
- inform members of activities in the church that may be of interest and offer suggestions as to possible responses.

- ☐ **Becoming a member of national Affirmation and receive the quarterly newsletter.**
- ☐ **Upcoming national Affirmation Gatherings.**
- ☐ **Affirmation groups or events in my region or city.**
- ☐ **Starting a local group.**
- ☐ **I want to provide financial support for the work of Affirmation. Enclosed is a donation of \$**

Phone _____ Annual Conference _____

Affirmation
United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay
and Bisexual Concerns
P.O. Box 1021
Evanston, IL 60204.

Dick Burdon is a retired member of the Oregon-Idaho Conference, a member of University Park UMC (a Reconciling Congregation), Portland, OR. He has been a missionary to Brazil and Zaire; and is a member of the OR-ID Conference Board of Church and Society, which is

Affirmation Newsletter
Published by the Evangelism
Committee of Affirmation
David Gunnell, Chairperson
George F. Hodgdon, Editor

Affirmation: United Methodists
for Lesbian, Gay and
Bisexual Concerns
P.O. Box 1021
Evanston, IL 60204
Tel. (708) 733-9590
E-Mail:
umaffirm@concentric.net

Affirmation Newsletter is published quarterly and is mailed to every member of Affirmation.

The official views of Affirmation are stated by the Co-Spokespersons.

Opinions offered in signed columns, letters and articles are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation.

We reserve the right to edit or reject any material submitted for publication.



Happy Halloween

From the Editor's Corner

Why Bother Trying to be Faithful?

In the aftermath of the 1996 General Conference and its lack of concern for the future of Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals in The United Methodist Church, many members of Affirmation and their friends must be thinking "Why bother?" Yes, why bother trying to be faithful to a church which, in many ways, denies our very existence.

But, of course, our faithfulness is to God, not to any church or other human institution.

In the opening paragraph of John Linscheid's reflection on Ezekiel ("Prophets in Our Midst," *The Other Side*, Jan-Feb. 1991) he writes "Ezekiel's struggle, like our own, is a struggle to be faithful. Prophet to his own people, the nation of Israel, during the exile, Ezekiel was called to speak the word of God to a generation that did not want to listen. And he was warned by God that it wouldn't be easy: 'The people are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them and you shall say to them 'Thus says the Lord God.' And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know there has been a prophet among them'" (Ezek. 2:4-5).

It's not too difficult to fit ourselves into this story. Are we not prophets to our own people—our society which includes our United Methodist Church? Many members of Affirmation have been called to be preachers, or teachers, or prophets, in answer to God's command. Many have been sent to the modern Israel—Christians who have rebelled against God ("God so loved the world. . ." yet so many preach hatred!) to speak God's word (of love), but God has warned us that it will not be easy "for they are a rebellious house."

Yes, "they" (in this case, the homophobic members of General Conference) have been rebellious, have refused to listen, in this generation, to the word of the Lord God.

Why bother trying to be faithful? How long has this struggle been going on, and how long will it continue? Is it worth it? All the grief, the cost, the myriad disappointments—how long, Lord?

There were signs at General Conference indicating a change in the attitude towards gays: the witness of the 15 bishops; the change in the percentages of those opposed to gay rights; the perceived change in the attitude of many of the delegates. Yes, there were changes but nothing seemed to change! The *Discipline* still contains the condemnatory wording.

Yet we are still called to speak the word of God to this generation which does not want to hear it. Yes, even though the hard-hearted homophobes refuse to hear the Word or open their minds to the fresh winds of the Spirit, we must push on, we must be faithful to our calling.

Please turn to Page Ten

COME TO NEW YORK!

October 18-20, 1996 for National Affirmation's Fall Gathering

Meeting Site: St. Paul and St. Andrews United Methodist Church, a Reconciling Congregation
86th Street and Broadway

Housing: Limited Private Housing (indicate on form below, **return by September 20!**)
See information on reverse for other forms of housing.

Begin: 7:00 pm Friday, October 18 (no meal, snack foods available)

End: With lunch Sunday, October 20

Registration: By **September 20** (if you want private housing) or **October 1** if using housing described on reverse or finding your own housing.

Registration Fee:	Income	Fee
	Student/Subsistence	\$30
	Under \$20,000/yr	\$50
	\$20,001-\$30,000/yr	\$75
	\$30,001-\$40,000/yr	\$100
	\$Over \$40,000/yr	\$110

Theme: "Building/Developing a Lesbian/Gay/ Bisexual Theology of Liberation"

tear off here

Mail to P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204 or Internet: umaffirm@concentric.net

NAME _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

☐ I desire Private Housing (cannot be guaranteed after September 20)

☐ I will stay at _____
(from information on reverse side → return this form by October 1)

☐ I will otherwise arrange my own housing.

I have the following special needs per food, housing, etc.:

I have enclosed the registration fee of \$ _____
I have enclosed an additional amount to enable another to attend \$ _____
TOTAL ENCLOSED (Check payable to National Affirmation) \$ _____

(Please feel free to copy and distribute this form!)

HOUSING INFORMATION FOR NEW YORK FALL MEETING

Economic Housing Options:

FREE HOUSING: First come first serve--stay with friends of Affirmation in N.Y.C.
(Registration form must be returned by Sept. 20)

International Youth Hostel, (104th and Amsterdam) (212) 932-2574

CALL NOW FOR RESERVATIONS!

\$25 Dormitory (12 beds)

\$26 Dormitory (8 beds)

\$28 Dormitory (4 beds)

\$78 Double with Private Bath (reserve early!)

(For the following, the source of information is: TIME OUT NY)

de Hirsch Residence at the 92nd St. "Y"

1395 Lexington Ave (at 92nd St.) Single \$45 Double \$66

Hotel Beacon 2130 Broadway at 75th 800 572-4969

Rooms with kitchenettes from \$120

Excelsior 45 W. 81st St. 800 368-4575

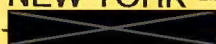
Single \$65-\$75

One Bedroom Suites \$94-\$108

Double \$75-\$87

Two Bedroom Suites \$130-\$150

TOURIST IDEAS

Call the NYC Convention & Visitors Bureau, 800-NYC-VISIT to have them send you "The Guide" and other information. When you arrive pick up a copy for \$3 of "TIME OUT NEW YORK"--or subscribe for \$40 and you will get ALL the info you need to plan a great week---. They have a good section specifically for the Gay/Lesbian community.